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Running head: PERSONNEL RETENTION IN THE U.S. NAVY

Personnel Retention in the U.S. Navy:

A Strategic Communication Approach

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### Abstract

Information campaigns are used frequently to educate and inform an audience, as well as change their behavior. The Navy's communication methods regarding the retention problem over the last few years have tried to increase retention trends. When analyzing these efforts through persuasion methods, specifically Mendelsohn's (1973) information campaign theory, the efforts have not been targeted or specific enough to make a significant difference. This paper examines the role of communication in the Navy's retention problem, suggests a specific information campaign as one way to help turn around the retention problem, analyzes and critiques communication efforts to date, and finally suggests a strategic information campaign geared at families as one way to improve retention information.





## Personnel Retention in the U.S. Navy:

### A Strategic Communication Approach

Corporations nationwide are having a difficult time retaining quality junior people because of the combination of a great economy, low unemployment and increased competition between companies to recruit quality workers. This is leaving some companies with low manning and is adding to already existing retention and recruiting problems.

Add to this mix the fact that the profile of the American family has changed dramatically over the last few decades so that organizations who want to keep qualified workers with families have to adjust the benefits offered to these families. The U.S. military is part of this mix and is examining how it handles its junior and career personnel and their families.

This thesis looks at the retention challenges facing the United States Navy, and specifically how the Navy has used communications efforts to convince the quality Sailor to stay in the Navy.

Specifically, this paper will:

- Look at the problem of retention facing the Navy today
- Examine the use of communication as one method to help solve the problem
- Look at what the Navy has done so far in using communication to solve the retention problem
- Evaluate the Navy's communication efforts to date
- Propose a strategic communications plan for the Retention Team/Center



The thesis will look at how other corporations are handling their retention problems and what studies are saying about retention issues for junior personnel. If these differ greatly from what the Navy is currently doing, the thesis will propose a new direction for themes and how to communicate them.

Some point to the changing face of the American family as a reason for the refocus from jobs and career to a more balanced lifestyle. The last few decades has seen a dramatic change in the face of the American family and how individual families and the job market are trying to adjust to the new approach. There are more nontraditional families – single parents, divorced parents, dual career couples, older parents of younger children, etc. – than ever before. To meet this new market, there are dozens of publications and magazines on newsstands, as well as web sites on the internet, geared toward families who are trying to balance their work with families. Many of these family type magazines feature monthly awards or recognition of corporations who are family friendly. Some companies encourage flexible time or working out of the home. Others are offering childcare centers at the job headquarters to allow parents and children to have more time together. Still others are experimenting with longer leaves of absence following birth or adoption for a family.

Because corporations are competing harder for quality people, these benefits packages often are the focus of the potential recruits. Companies have to make their packages – not just salary – more attractive to the prospective worker. Competition is getting more and more fierce.

The U.S. military is not exempt in the area of shortage of quality personnel or in the arena of developing more attractive benefits packages. In fact, some people believe



the military is having a worse time than other corporations and businesses. Changes in demographics of society's workforce are mirrored in the military. The combination of several problems – an all-volunteer force, years of personnel downsizing and increasing operational tempo (deploying) – has created what some analysts and think-tanks call the start of a hollow force, similar to the post-Vietnam era. Because the number of active service personnel and veterans is decreasing, fewer recruiting age young Americans know someone who has served in the military.

Table 1 - DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS OF U.S. NAVY PERSONNEL

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1999</b>
Active Duty Navy personnel	508,254	368,040
Married Navy	75,635 (14.3% of all enlisted, 19.6% of all officers)	44,427 (11.1% of all enlisted, 18.1% of all officers)
Married with Children	144,689	128,909
Military Spouse w/ Children	0 (no data)	5,856
Military Spouse	7,329	8,908
Single	216,943 (44.9% of all enlisted, 25.5% of all officers)	158,009 (45.9% of all enlisted, 24.7% of all enlisted)
Single with Children	13,043	18,916

(Data provided by the Center for Naval Analyses)

To add to the challenge, the military only hires entry-level people, whereas corporations hire at all levels. Low retention is not easy to solve in the military; mid-level people must grow from the junior ranks and can't be hired in. Several problems plagued





retention efforts in the past few years: a strong U.S. economy, more propensity for high school graduates to attend college rather than join the military, low unemployment and fewer veterans in society. Internal problems also existed: not involving family enough in the communication efforts, and lack of message discipline.

For many years, the Navy has had a sizable Chief of Naval Operations' Retention Team. Their sole purpose was to travel the world to different commands and survey people on why they were leaving the Navy, why they chose to stay in, what factors influenced those decisions, what could change their minds, etc. During the personnel draw down, this team was also downsized from approximately 20 people and virtually eliminated (one senior enlisted person). Just recently, the Navy has been augmenting and redeveloping the scope and mission of this team.

Because retention has not improved in the last few years, the Navy is again concentrating on the need for a focused retention effort. This will include a team of people dedicated to shape retention policy, monitor and appraise retention programs and initiatives, provide information on career programs and benefits, educate naval personnel on career benefits and monitor trends through statistical reports. This team will comprise the Navy Retention Center, which will be located in the future in Millington, Tenn., home of the Chief of Naval Personnel Command.

Individual communities within the Navy are beginning to poll their personnel to determine what is making their people stay or go. Most recently, the Surface Warfare Officer community surveyed their members and received a very high rate of returns on the questionnaires. According to the retention team, many of the surveys had extensive





hand-written sections with individual's opinions. This could provide a valuable tool for understanding what is keeping people in -- and what is driving people out of -- the Navy.

The CNO's Retention Team and the Bureau of Naval Personnel, which handles such personnel issues, are both located in Washington, D.C. Because retention is such a crucial issue to the Navy right now, affecting readiness in real world deployments, I believe that examination of the historic communication efforts and recommendation for a future strategic communication effort could be useful in the Navy's retention efforts.

## Literature Review

### Mass Media and Trade Journals

The mass media and business and trade journals are full of articles and reviews of failed as well as innovative retention efforts. From USA Today to Harvard Business Review, publications are looking at what is making the young and qualified workers leave their companies and migrate to others. Because U.S. military leaders testify publicly on Capital Hill regarding various military issues (readiness, weapons systems, personnel issues), media also covered the retention problems facing all of the services.

Very little military and Navy specific research exists on retention efforts and failures, likely because of the unique and closed-system nature of the military. This section will examine a combination of the information campaign studies and reviews of existing studies regarding retention efforts.

Mass media have covered retention issues in companies worldwide extensively in recent months. News stories cover the problems of keeping quality teachers in the nation's schools, how firms are going so far as to hire gourmet cooks to provide food to



employees on site, and even on the importance of mentoring. Several newspapers reported on the growth of mentoring programs in large and small corporations to improve morale and keep turnover low (USA Today, Detroit News, Indianapolis Star, Los Angeles Times, The London Independent, Minneapolis Star-Tribune, and the San Diego Union-Tribune). Overall, programs that connected junior employees with more experienced workers helped the workers feel connected to the company, feel like they had somewhere to turn if there was a problem, and created more of a bond with the parent company.

Trade journals have also been examining the issue of retention in their sectors, from government to high-technology, auto workers to sales and marketing. All areas seem to be examining pay and benefits, building strong recognition programs, mentoring, close connection with the parent company, the need for challenging work, incorporating flexible work schedules, encouraging tuition assistance and other education program use by employees, available amenities at the work place, and establishing better manager/employee communication (Harvard Business Review, Government Executive, Training and Development, Inc., HR Focus, Folio, Sales and Marketing Management, and Fast Company Magazine).

The specific issue of military readiness (recruiting and retention) has even crept into the presidential campaigns, as noted in a recent newspaper article, as candidates agree “that higher military pay, better health care benefits and more generous retirement packages are necessary to recruit and retain the best of America’s youth” (Bowman, 2000). A recent opinion piece raises the same issues, saying that more than half of the military’s personnel are stressed from high deployment rates and don’t believe their units



have the necessary equipment to do assigned missions (Maginnis, 2000). Because of these problems, the “military is hemorrhaging quality personnel,” and that is leaving the United States with a dispirited and shrinking military, the writer says.

Media continue to cover the fixes that the military and the country are examining, including increasing housing allowances, renovating the existing retirement plans, medical reform, and even examining the current mission requirements of the services. Newspaper headlines shout the urgency that the military is facing in both recruiting and retention and some unique approaches to the problems: “Stranded at Sea” (Washington Times, Feb. 24, 2000); “Military’s Unorthodox Approach to Shopping for Soldiers” (Christian Science Monitor, Feb. 28, 2000); “Army to Recruit Dropouts, Help Them Earn Diploma” (Washington Post, Feb. 4, 2000); “Focus on ‘Quality Of Life’ Improvements for Troops, Veterans” (Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Feb. 14, 2000); “AF Hope New Logo Will Help Recruiting Soar” (San Antonio Express-News, Feb. 3, 2000); “For U.S. Aviators, Readiness Woes Are a 2-Front Struggle – Veteran Mechanics and Spare Parts in Short Supply” (Washington Post, Feb. 3, 2000); “Navy Equips 2,000 Officers with Palm V Hand-held Computers” (Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, Feb. 12, 2000); “Minding the Military: Missions Spread Limited Resources Too Thinly” (Colorado Springs Gazette, Feb. 8, 2000); “Compromises Hamper Military Recruiting” (The Indianapolis Star, Oct. 17, 1999); “Pentagon Reaches for Celebrities to Recruit” (Los Angeles Times, Jan. 29, 2000); “Military Troop Shortage Starts Talk of a Draft” (The San Francisco Chronicle, Aug. 22, 1999); “Military Faces High-Tech Security Shortage” (Colorado Springs Gazette, Feb. 15, 2000); “Young Officers’ Anger, Frustration Stun Navy’s Top Brass”





(Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Jan. 29, 2000); "Military Finds Junior Officer Discontent" (USA Today, Feb. 18, 2000); and dozens more.

A change in the face of today's military member could be the reason for some of the retention problems. According to a recent study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., 56 percent of service members are married, a major increase in recent years, and service members are older on average; quality-of-life concerns, including pay, health care, and time with family are now more important ("Stress in the Ranks," 2000). The report's conclusion showed that "readiness and morale have slipped; recruiting and retention are problematic; and careers in the military have become less satisfying." Some recommendations included improving internal communications, improving methods of measuring morale and reassessing mission demands on units.

Some officer communities in the Navy are starting to poll their members to see where dissatisfaction, concerns, and problem areas exist, in an attempt to stem the exodus of qualified officers from the ranks. The Surface Warfare Officer community distributed a questionnaire in August 1999; the survey had a 55 percent return rate (2,493) and more than 1,000 respondents had written responses in addition to the multiple-choice questions. Top job satisfiers, as reported in several media, included conning (steering) the ship, port visits, mentally challenging work, and at-sea operations; top dissatisfiers included micromanagement, zero-defects atmosphere, sea duty workload too heavy, and the Tricare health care system (Peniston, 2000; Crawley, 2000). Reasons for leaving the military included good civilian employment options, too heavy of a workload in the Navy, inadequate pay and compensation, poor leadership, and a zero-defect environment.





### Scholarly Journals

Articles specifically related to the military and personnel retention tend to be limited to a few journals, but several articles in the past decade have addressed this retention problem. In a 1987 study that looked at predicting retention in the U.S. Navy, the researcher examined officers' and enlisted persons' reasons for staying and leaving the Navy (Marsh, 1989). The researcher found that family variables rated more important than service history and expectations when it came to job satisfaction, but seniority in the Navy, paygrade and expected highest paygrade and military satisfaction accounted for retention decisions (p. 25).

Another study in 1986 looked at spouse support and its impact on retention intentions for Air Force members (Bowen). The study looked at enlisted men and women and officer men, and it found that spouse support had a significant and positive effect on retention for the three groups. The study also found that satisfaction with Air Force life was a strong retention predictor for the men studied (p. 219). Another factor looked at was the growing number of family support programs and initiatives (family service/support centers, child care centers, recreational services and facilities, emergency relief organizations, etc.) that the Air Force and other services have. The researcher found that the level of support that a member receives during his or her career appears to be affected by the programs that improve quality of life for families (p. 219).

A 1989 doctoral dissertation reviewed existing statistics from a Department of Defense survey to examine family factors on retention intention, especially as influenced by the family lifecycle (Gallant, 1989). The study concluded that family factors can affect service members' retention intentions, that lifecycle positions (married, with or



without children, divorced, etc.) are a big influence, that pay is a stronger incentive for enlisted members, and that intangible benefits (retirement, medical care, etc.) influence officers' retention intentions. However, the study also notes that most conclusions and studies come from anecdotal evidence, not empirical, and that until more solid information can be gained for review, the results should be viewed in this anecdotal perspective.

Retention intentions of reserve soldiers in the U.S. Army was the subject of a 1995 study that found that a spouse's favorable attitude toward a soldier's reenlistment was positively related to that reservist's reenlistment (Lakhani, p. 125). Based on that finding, the researcher recommended that the Army involve spouses more in reserve training, such as including them in attending and observing weekend drills (p. 126). The researcher believed that by educating spouses on the role that their active duty husbands or wives perform on weekends, the spouses would be even more favorable to the idea of a continued career in the Army reserves.

Looking at specific benefits (or pitfalls) of home-basing, an Army initiative that would move large numbers of troops and families from outside the United States to inside the United States, a 1994 study found several benefits to the Army, its members and their families (Lakhani). The study showed that home-basing would improve quality of spouse employment, quality of family life (satisfaction with housing), spouses' satisfaction with Army life and retention, and savings in child care expenses for soldiers and the Army (p. 124). Although there could be down sides to the home-basing, such as decreased desire to move at all, less spouse involvement in the military network, and inequities in home ownership among soldiers. But the overall benefits to the soldiers and



their families, especially in view of the retention issue, were seen as a huge benefit for such a program as home-basing.

### Information Campaigns

Information campaigns are almost everywhere you look, ranging on subjects from warning of preservatives in cosmetics to advising citizens how to limit air pollution. These campaigns evolve as the media and technology used to communicate changes and is updated. Several books look at the relationship between social values and social change. Editor Charles Salmon (1989) notes that researchers draw heavily on psychological and sociological theory to improve their effectiveness in reaching objectives. Information campaigns then become a process and administrative notion. Salmon has several focuses: social values, social barriers, and social power of change agents; second, that marketing and strategic communications are margining in the information campaign field; and third, that information campaigns use psychology, social theory, and quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

A 1970 study on information campaigns in rural Wisconsin showed a positive correlation between information gain and attitude change (Douglas, Westley and Chaffee). However, the researchers found that the basics of a successful campaign includes non-controversial issues, small communities (too big of value range in large cities), that chronic know-nothings do not exist, information will change attitude, and that media personal interface must work together to succeed.

Another reason why information campaigns can succeed is when social science research is combined with communication efforts in a way that the communicator thoroughly understands his or her target audience. This includes effective research to





determine appropriate targets, themes, appeals and media vehicles (Mendelsohn, 1973). According to Mendelsohn, prior research is essential in order appropriately target our goals and audiences and to evaluate information efforts realistically (p. 61). A successful information campaign will be built around three critical elements: that the campaign is going to people who are mildly interested in the issue or not interested at all, that the campaign will have reasonable and reachable middle-range goals, and that the planner understands the demographics and psychographics (value and belief system, where they get information, etc.).

This paper will answer the following two research questions:

1. Have communication efforts played a part in the retention problem?
2. How can communication efforts be improved, and possibly impact the retention problem?

I will answer the first research question in the framework of successful information campaigns (Mendelsohn, 1973) and use existing Navy statistics to show the degree to which retention efforts failed. I will also use the information campaign framework to propose a strategic approach for a communication plan geared toward more effective targeting a specific audience, thereby improving the communication efforts toward retention.

Not much research has been done in recent years in the context of military communication on the importance of communication efforts in retention of today's servicemember. Much of the military's work in communication and attitude change tends to be in the framework of whatever has been done in the last several years. Because communication efforts regarding retention are an attempt to change behavior





and attitude (encourage more people to make the decision to stay in the Navy), the communication should take more of a strategic, targeted approach. This paper, while using existing information, will propose such a targeted, direct campaign.

This paper only uses existing information (available statistics, media coverage, questionnaire and survey results, etc.), so the results and focus of the paper are determined by the scope of this information. I did not go out and gather or build any information and statistics, so this limits the amount of information that is specific to my research.

It is possible that the communication efforts regarding retention have failed to date because not enough research was done. It is also possible that the timing of the military's efforts have just happened to coincide with a difficult time in corporate history – low unemployment, a good economy, more corporations offering benefits and signing bonuses to new employees, etc. – that would have made retention difficult at best, and that the best communication planning would not have made a difference. Another possibility is that inappropriate media vehicles were used; the media used were not ones used by the target audience. Yet another possibility is that the themes and appeals of the campaign were not targeted enough to the appropriate audience, thereby missing their mark.

In looking at how to improve the communication efforts on retention, my research has several possible outcomes. Identifying the correct media vehicle may improve the communication efforts and increase awareness of retention issues and propensity to reenlist. It is possible that all despite using all appropriate media, targeting the right audience, and setting reasonable and realistic middle-range goals will not make a



difference in the retention issue; it may just be difficult timing for the military and the Navy. Or research may show that by more specifically targeting the audience, the Navy can communicate more effectively the benefits of retention to the average Sailor and his or her family. Yet another outcome may be that by refocusing the themes and the appeals of the retention effort, the message will be more clear and effective.

Based on Mendelsohn's framework of a successful information campaign, I believe that the most effective way to reach and communicate to the Navy member is by targeting a more specific audience with a specific theme. For example, by targeting an audience of families with a theme of the benefits to the Sailor and his or her family, the retention message will be effectively communicated to the desired audience.

### Method

Because retention issues cover such a vast array of corporate and sociological issues, I conducted research with specific limitations in mind. I used articles and statistics on retention from the Department of Defense and the Department of the Navy (specifically, the Chief of Naval Operations Retention Team) to establish a framework of retention issues, challenges and successes.

The Retention Team was a crucial source of information specific to the issue. They provided many useful documents, including historical point papers, a framework for the scope of the new retention team, vision and planning documents, and key discussion items at meetings regarding the leadership issues.

Retention of qualified and key personnel is an issue facing many corporations and companies, so I was able to find a wealth of stories in mass media (newspapers,



magazines, internet sites), trade journals (business-specific media) through internet searches. In addition, many scholarly journals address the retention issue in various professional fields, from doctors to college professors. Job satisfaction and retention are two areas that are covered in popular and scholarly journals alike to a great extent.

I interviewed the leader of the Navy's Retention Team, Commander Dave Caldwell, several times to establish where efforts had gone wrong in the past, and in what direction the Retention Team was trying to head. Caldwell is a career Navy officer and just reported to his current position from being executive officer of a surface ship. As executive officer, he dealt with retention issues daily for his crew of 200 Sailors, but this is the first time he has had the opportunity to work in Washington, D.C., in the Bureau of Naval Personnel, where the Retention Team is currently located. My questions included:

- What issues do you see affecting manning today in the Navy?
- What roles do communication efforts play in the attempt to keep good people?
- What programs historically have worked (or failed) to keep Sailors in the Navy?
- What new initiatives and programs is the Navy developing?
- How important has the family been in the communication efforts?
- How does the Retention Team and the Navy communicate with the Sailors? With the families?
- Where does the Retention Team get information about job satisfaction and career intentions for Sailors either staying in or getting out of the Navy?

Within the framework of Mendelsohn's (1973) theory on successful information campaigns, I asked the following questions of personnel specialists:





- What kind of restraints/constraints do we (Navy) have from doing surveys or questionnaires of our people? I think anything we do has to be approved by the DMDC, right?
- How would you characterize the "information campaign" regarding personnel retention -- geared toward people who are mildly or not at all interested, or geared toward people that the Navy assumes will be interested.
- What kind of goals have been set by this campaign -- solid, measurable goals? Short-range goals? Middle-range goals? Long-term goals (turn retention problem around)?
- The Navy has a lot about Sailors demographically (age, gender, religion, family status, etc.), but what about psychographics -- value and belief systems, where they get their media information, etc.?

Statistics on Navy came from the Center for Naval Analyses; I requested basic demographic information on Navy service members (age, gender, pay grades, family information, etc.). Overall society statistics came from the Census Bureau.

This thesis looks specifically at the communication issues surrounding retention, so my research included review of articles from scholarly journals on the importance of communication efforts in retaining quality employees, as well as articles from business and trade publications on current and innovative efforts in retention today.

### Results and Discussion:

Although retention figures continue to move in a positive direction, the Navy still has work ahead to reach the point where it needs to be; the overall trend is positive, although certain groups of Sailors are not re-enlisting as strongly as the Navy would hope





(Ryan, 2000). The Navy has tried to communicate to its personnel that the personnel draw down of the late 1980's and early 1990's is over, and that the Navy is trying to keep its good Sailors. This indicates a move toward steady state requirements, when the Navy is not trying to downsize (reduce numbers of Sailors) or build up. The retention figures noted in Table 2 indicate where the Navy's retention figures need to be currently and where they actually are, as of March 2000. The most current rates are an improvement over a year ago, but the Navy still must work to increase the retention figures. And the Navy still faces a lot of competition – low unemployment in the civilian sector and lots of other companies trying to hire quality high school graduates (Caldwell, 2000).

Table 2 - RETENTION RATES FOR U.S. NAVY ENLISTED PERSONNEL

<b>Category</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Term</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Term</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Term</b>
Steady State Requirements	38%	54%	62%
Current (as of March 2000)	30.6%	47.3%	57.9%

(provided by Bureau of Naval Personnel)

One of the efforts the Navy is making to help solve the retention problem is to strengthen the existing retention team with a dedicated Retention Center located in Millington, Tenn., as part of the Chief of Naval Personnel Command; this is a considerable build up from the small Retention Team that used to exist in Washington, D.C. The new Center will help shape retention policy, monitor and evaluate retention programs and initiatives, provide information on programs and advancement to naval personnel worldwide, educate naval personnel on benefits of a Navy career, and monitor



retention and separation trends in the Navy. In addition, the Center will begin traveling worldwide to Navy commands to talk to service members, provide them information, and get feedback on the issues that are important to them (Caldwell, 2000).

Information campaigns are common, as discussed in the introduction. As media and technology have improved effectiveness, so campaigns have been able to better target specific groups of people with specific messages. Many scholars have examined the trends and effectiveness of information campaigns. In viewing the relationship between social values and social change, editor Charles Salmon (1989) notes that researchers draw heavily on psychological and sociological theory to improve their effectiveness in reaching objectives. Information campaigns then become a process and administrative notion. Salmon notes the importance of recognizing social values, social barriers, and social power of change agents; second, that marketing and strategic communications are merging in the information campaign field; and third, that information campaigns use psychology, social theory, and quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

Another study found that information campaigns made up of non-controversial issues in small communities can succeed. The 1970 study on information campaigns in rural Wisconsin showed a positive correlation between information gain and attitude change (Douglas, Westley and Chaffee). The researchers also determined that chronic know-nothings do not exist, that information will change attitude, and that media personal interface must work together to succeed.

In a study that looked at recruiting and retention issues for reserve Army soldiers, the researcher believed that the communication environment of the organization was



believed to be the most dominant determinant of perceived recruiting and retention success (Stephens, 1977). This was based on a series of questions asked of soldiers about the effectiveness of command information, knowledge questions about their commander and about incentives for recruiting and retention (p. 34).

Some reasons why information campaigns can succeed include when the communicator or planner thoroughly understands his or her audience and knows of obstacles in the way of the campaigns success. This means combining social science research with communication efforts in a way that the communicator thoroughly understands his or her target audience and the issue and includes effective research to determine appropriate targets, themes, appeals and media vehicles (Mendelsohn, 1973). A successful information campaign must be built around three critical elements: that the campaign is going to people who are mildly interested in the issue or not interested at all, that the campaign will have reasonable and reachable middle-range goals, and that the planner understands the demographics and psychographics (value and belief system, where they get information, etc.).

A successful information campaign, according to Mendelsohn (1973), must have three critical elements. First, campaigns must be planned around know-nothings, or people who are at best mildly interested in the information (p. 52). Much research, as cited in the introduction, has established the fact that a large sector of the American public is not aware and doesn't want to be aware of certain issues, be it drunk driving, the importance of immunizing children, wearing seat belts, the dangers of smoking, etc. Knowing that an audience probably won't care about the goals of one's campaign helps keep the scope of goals, the identity of the audience, and the amount of research needed clear.





Navy information campaigns are traditionally targeted to the service members, assuming that they will read the media vehicles in which the stories are placed, such as the Navy Wire and News services (periodic internal news services for the Navy), "Navy Times" (a weekly independent newspaper sold on bases worldwide), "Navy/Marine Corps News" (a weekly internal news show sent via videotape to every Navy command), Captain's Call Kits (packages of pertinent Navy information sent to commanding officers of units to disseminate to Sailors), Web sites, and various other media efforts. Although it is usually assumed that not everyone is interested in the issue of retention, it is often taken for granted that enough service members affected by the issue and about to make the decision will have access to the specific retention story and pay attention to the messages in it. (Caldwell, 2000)

The second element, according to Mendelsohn (1973), is that the campaign must set as specific objectives some middle-range goals that can be achieved as an outcome of exposure (p. 52). For instance, in this case of retention problems for the Navy, a middle-range goal would not be to create a drastic about-face in retention figures, hoping to achieve a double-digit percentage increase in one year. Rather, middle-range goals might include to make the target audience aware of benefits of retention and of a career in the Navy and to direct the target Sailors toward resources that can provide more specifics on the benefits of reenlistment. The information campaign will probably not be able to ameliorate all problems having to do with a certain problem or issue. It is better to set reasonable and reachable goals based on the campaign. This helps in measuring and evaluating the success (or failure) of the campaign and suggesting improvements for the next campaign.





Middle-range goals, the second criteria, are not a common element of Navy public affairs efforts in the area of retention. For large and often controversial issues, the public affairs office will often set goals for the public affairs efforts, but these goals are not necessarily middle-range in nature and are often geared toward helping solve the issue or problem, not just a step of information and exposure toward solving the problem. The same is true in this case. No middle range goals were set in the information campaign regarding retention.

Mendelsohn's (1973) third element is that campaigns must then carefully outline demographic and psychographic attributes, lifestyles, value and belief systems, and mass media habits. This element includes learning the extent and roots of indifference to the subject. Different people react in different ways to the same message. For that reason, it is important for any planner or researcher to know the audience to whom he is communicating. The categories for demographics are endless -- gender, age, race, economic status, education background, religion, ethnic heritage, geographic location, and more. With today's diverse media targeting various sectors of the audiences, as opposed to just a few media targeting everyone only a few decades ago, a planner must target the audience well. Does the target audience spend spare time in sports activities? artistic endeavors? indoor activities? religion? Is family important to the target audience, or is a career the top priority? These questions can help narrow the field of where the audience may get its information and help determine where the information campaign elements should be placed.

There is abundant demographic information available on the usual Navy audience, the service member. The Navy, the Department of Defense, and other



organizations, such as the Center for Naval Analyses, have databases that allow breakdowns of information regarding service members. Information such as age, gender, race, pay grade, time in service, job specialty (designator and rank), information on family size, and other statistical information is readily available for those needing such details. There is even information on each service member's media habits, but that is as far as the information goes. There is little information readily available regarding lifestyles, value and belief systems, but the annual Navywide Personnel Survey does provide some information on mass media habits.

Table 3 –MEDIA HABITS OF NAVY PERSONNEL

In which of the following sources do you find most of your general information about the Navy?	Enlisted		Officer	
	1997	1998	1997	1998
Navy produced information sources (base/command newspaper, Navy/Marine Corps TV News, "All Hands" magazine, Navy messages, plans of the day/week, morning quarters, Captain's Call, word from your chain of command, other Navy information sources.	84%	80%	76%	69%
Externally produced information sources ("Navy Times" or other navy focused publication)	12%	16%	20%	25%
Local or national newspaper	1%	1%	2%	4%
Local or national television	3%	3%	2%	2%

(Provided by the Chief of Naval Personnel Command, from the Annual Navywide Personnel Survey)



Table 4 –MEDIA HABITS OF NAVY PERSONNEL

Where do you find most of your information about Navy personnel policies and programs which affect you?	Enlisted		Officer	
	1997	1998	1997	1998
Navy produced information sources (base/command newspaper, Navy/Marine Corps TV News, "All Hands" magazine, Navy messages, plans of the day/week, morning quarters, Captain's Call, word from your chain of command, other Navy information sources.	87%	85%	85%	80%
Externally produced information sources ("Navy Times" or other navy focused publication)	11%	14%	14%	19%
Local or national newspaper	1%	0%	1%	1%
Local or national television	1%	1%	0%	0%

(Provided by the Chief of Naval Personnel Command, from the Annual Navywide Personnel Survey)

Another tool, the "Navy Retention/Separation Questionnaire," is a valuable source of info regarding the service members' decision to stay in or leave the Navy. The questionnaire asks Sailors who are separating or making a retention decision to rate their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with 43 factors of Navy life. Sailors are also asked which of the factors is most important in their decision to leave the Navy (or think of leaving the Navy). Retirement benefits has been a growing dissatisfier for those responding from 1990 to 1998, according to the Bureau of Naval Personnel.

Considering all of the elements of Mendelsohn's theory of successful information campaigns, the Navy has not incorporated some critical elements into their efforts to change retention, or even increase awareness of retention benefits, Navy wide. Although not necessarily the only factor in the inability to change retention rates, the lack of a





communication campaign perspective could have an impact on the ability to inform Sailors about the benefits of retention and what impact it could have on them individually.

Research is a key factor of all of these elements. The planners must know the objectives of the campaign, must be able to specifically target their audience and must know what resources are available to help make any information campaign work. As Mendelsohn (1973) notes, media use in a campaign is rarely the sole determinant of that campaign's success. Rather, research into the right targets, themes, appeals, and media vehicles coupled with the use of media can help make a campaign a success.

Weaving these elements of a successful information campaign into a strategic communications plan has several elements and stages. Many scholars and research incorporate the same basic steps into any strategic plan: start with a situation analysis to determine main and secondary issues and identifies goals; conduct research; clearly identify an audience; clearly outline a message; and identify specific vehicles to carry the message (Windahl & Signitzer, 1992; Dougherty, 1992; Hancock, 1992; and Middleton and Wedemeyer, 1985). The communicator should also evaluate the process and forthcoming steps at every stage to ensure that the strategy is headed in the right direction, and that corrections can be made before moving forward with the implementation side.

A strategic campaign should start with a situation analysis that defines challenges, looks at problems and obstacles, considers parallel challengers, identifies key and secondary issues, and examines trends. This research is key in knowing the framework in which the planner and communicator must operate. Rarely is an issue all by itself. There



are often other issues paired with it or that impact the planners main issue. Part of this analysis is clearly identifying goals. What is the desired end result of the information campaign and strategy? By delineating up front what the end result should be, the planner allows for a clearer measure of success (or failure) at the end of the campaign. Immeasurable goals are not useful, because the planner cannot know if those goals were actually reached or not.

Knowing what the audience is thinking and how to reach them entails research. This also presupposes that the researchers have outlined a clear, targeted audience. In this case, the audience would not be just "Navy service members." Rather, a more successful campaign would target officers or enlisted, maybe even further narrowed down to job specialty, time in service, age and family status. Or it could be Navy families, maybe more specifically identified as families of officers or enlisted, or families of certain job specialties (aviators, submariners, surface warfare officers, etc.). This identification ties into the demographics and psychographics that Mendelsohn outlines in his critical elements for a successful information campaign. This research can be done using focus groups, actual surveys, or possibly using secondary research with existing demographics and psychographics of the audience.

Another critical element of a strategic plan, related to audience, has to do with segmentation of that audience. Any audience has fragments that should be identified and used. Opinion leaders are those people who have impact on a certain audience; sometimes these opinion leaders -- such as community leaders, church leaders, key school personnel, etc. -- can be the same across several audiences. Each audience then has its attentive public, or people who are interested in the issue or at least not violently



opposed to it, and inattentive publics, or as Mendelsohn calls them, chronic know-nothings.

The next element of the strategic plan is the message, the formulation of which depends on research into the audience and the medium to be used. A campaign to decrease drunk driving incidents wouldn't be aimed at preschoolers using late night television. So a campaign to encourage retention in the Navy wouldn't target those about to retire using magazines geared toward young audiences. The message must be clear, concise and understandable to the target audience.

The next element in the plan, the vehicle, must be based on understanding the impact of the medium and must be strategically consistent with the entire plan. Different media portray the same message in completely different ways. Television must have visual elements, the Web is geared more toward instantaneous news, and print news usually contains more detail and background. Different audiences use different media, so understanding one's audience is tied in, as Mendelsohn notes that a successful information campaign must include knowing from where the audience gets its information. Strategic consistence is important, as a campaign geared at high school students wouldn't use "Modern Maturity" magazine, or a plan targeting retired Americans wouldn't use MTV to convey the message.

Ever since the end of the personnel draw down, the Navy has made efforts to reverse the downward trend of retention and keep quality service members. Using a variety of communication methods, internal and external, the Navy has tried to communicate to its Sailors the benefits of staying Navy. However, many of these efforts

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have not been targeted at specific audiences and have attempted too large of a goal without measurable, middle range goals.

Internally, the Navy has used several print and broadcast media methods to inform Sailors about the importance and advantages of retention. Print stories in the Navy Wire and Navy News Services, daily and weekly compilations of Navy-related stories sent via e-mail and Navy message to every Navy command, appear frequently on the topic of reenlistment. Base and command newspapers around the world often use these stories and reprint them in their own papers, doubling the coverage of the stories. The Navy's monthly magazine, "All Hands," also features short news stories about retention and longer features about individual Sailors who have reenlisted in the Navy for a variety of reasons.

The Navy also uses its weekly news magazine television show, "Navy/Marine Corps News," to spread information about advantages of reenlistment. The show has included readers about various retention benefits (new allowances for certain job specialties) and featured people who have reenlisted.

Several Web sites also carry specific information about retention. The Navy's main web site, [www.navy.mil](http://www.navy.mil), carries copies of the Wire and News services, as well as links to retention pages. The site for the Chief of Naval Personnel Command, [www.bupers.navy.mil](http://www.bupers.navy.mil), has a specific retention page devoted to the new Retention Center recently established in Millington, Tenn. Lifelines, the site geared toward quality of life issues for service members and their families, also carries extensive information on retention benefits and issues.





Externally, the Navy has worked with various regional papers located in areas where Navy personnel are concentrated, to convey to Sailors changing and improved benefits for those who decide to stay in the Navy. Of course, the Navy has less control over how external media portray retention issues than when the stories are written and covered internally.

Using these methods, the Navy has kept the retention issue as a constant theme in internal media and has kept the issue a major talking point in interviews with external media. The tone of stories for internal media has usually specifically targeted specific groups of job specialties that are receiving increased bonuses for staying in the Navy. In interviews with external media, the focus has normally covered what current retention statistics are and where they need to be, with a look at a few job specialties that are receiving higher benefits because they are undermanned.

The Navy does have a budget for retention advertising, although quite a bit smaller than its recruiting budget (Caldwell, 2000). The Navy spent \$250,000 last year for ads in Navy Times and other local and regional newspapers with the theme, "Let the Journey Continue" (The recruiting slogan is "Let the Journey Begin"). Although some of the ads were targeted to specific job specialties or groups of people, the majority of the ads were very broad in their outreach (Caldwell, 2000). The retention advertising budget will increase to one-tenth of the recruiting budget (\$7 million) this fiscal year. The goals will be more targeted, but the Retention Center will use the same civilian firm that does the recruiting advertising, hoping for a more targeted and specific approach to the retention issue.



While internal stories have been consistently provided throughout the Navy's internal media, the majority have focused on one element of retention – the money and allowances that Sailors can get if they reenlist. The Personnel Command can change bonus amounts for reenlistment depending where certain job specialties are in their retention rates; specialties that are undermanned are given larger bonuses, while those who have plenty of people get smaller or no bonuses. These stories usually run when a change has taken place and is being announced. By establishing a theme up front and consistently using that message throughout all stories, the Navy could make the effort more of an effective information campaign. With consistent messaging, the audience expects to hear the same idea whenever they hear retention. Once the audience was researched to see what values resonate most (money, benefits, challenging job, etc.), the message could be reiterated throughout all stories covering the retention issue.

The same idea holds true of the Navy's Web sites. Much of what these sites cover is the same as what is in the internal media – updates on bonuses to encourage retention. The same theme should be incorporated here and throughout all products that cover the retention issue.

Although coverage by external media is difficult to control, the Navy could still get its message across by using the same, consistent theme from the internal media in its work with external media. When service members see the same message repeated over and over, the message will make sense when grouped with retention issues. Many of these regional media that cover retention issues are published in areas with high concentrations of Navy people, so the message is likely getting through to some sector of the Navy community, be it active duty Sailor or family member.



Retention advertising, until recently, appears to have followed the same path as much of the internal coverage encouraging service members to stay in the Navy – a general approach without a targeted message, audience or vehicle. It is encouraging to see that not only is the Navy planning to increase the budget for this advertising, but that they plan to use an agency whose work is focused on knowing the audience and what motivates them. This could dramatically improve the effectiveness of this advertising.

By incorporating Mendelsohn's elements of a successful information campaign and combining those elements with a strategic communication plan, the Navy could have a successful information campaign that targets a certain audience and educates and informs them of retention benefits. By taking a strategic approach, the Navy could have some reasonable success in realistic and measurable goals toward the end goal of improving retention.

The first step in the strategic plan is to create a situation analysis. As discussed earlier, this analysis provides the planner with a broader perspective in which to place the current issue. This analysis helps provide a clear look at the challenges, problems, and obstacles facing the solving of the issue at hand. It also allows a look at parallel challenges, as well as key and secondary issues. Much of this situational analysis regarding personnel retention in the Navy already exists, as discussed in the introduction. Corporate personnel retention is facing all levels of companies and organizations today, and mass media, trade journals and niche media are reporting this challenge as well as innovative ways to solve it. Such secondary research allows a look at parallel challenges and key/secondary issues, such as whether the issue is pay, benefits, job satisfaction, family issues, or something different altogether, such as low unemployment in the





civilian sector. The Navy does track historic retention trends, although the system is in the process of being updated to better reflect accurate retention goals and figures (Caldwell, 2000).

The current situation regarding Navy personnel retention as of March 2000 was that although the retention signs appeared to be headed in the right direction, much work is still to be done both in the officer and enlisted communities. A possible explanation for some of the improvements could have been front-loading in the year of certain communities' bonuses for reenlisting, and not reflective of an overall trend. The majority of programs designed to encourage retention are geared at monetary reimbursement for staying in and/or for taking the difficult jobs and assignments. Several quality of life initiatives are in place, but much effort appears to be geared toward financial gain for the service member who decides to stay in. The Navy is beginning to put increased emphasis on quality of life issues for service members and their families, not just pay. The Bureau of Naval Personnel has noted that quality of life issues are becoming increasingly family driven, including such issues as base housing, TRICARE (the military medical care system for service members and their families), and school. Some new issues under study (but not yet being looked at for inclusion or implementation) include additional assistance in travel and moving for Sailors and their families, increased hours at Child Development Centers, reducing automobile insurance costs, certain benefits for home purchases and many others. The military is seeing that some factors of military life – frequent moves and changes of home for service members and their families – is often a detractor when deciding between a civilian or a military job.



Other incentives for increasing retention among officers include reducing micro-management perceptions, continually improving ways of conducting business, looking at specialist career paths (more defined than the current warfare and occupation designators the Navy now uses), increasing opportunities for graduate education, using new bonus programs in specific officer specialties, and many other possibilities. The Navy is moving away from just throwing money at the situation and is looking to target specific reasons that officers and enlisted may have for leaving the Navy.

But there are other issues affecting this situation, including the continued strong U.S. economy, the record-setting job opportunities that continues to drive unemployment figures down, and the propensity for companies to offer significant bonuses to people who agree to work for them. All of these factors affect retention in the Navy.

The Navy has all of the elements and information necessary to create a thorough situation analysis of the issue of retention challenges. Between media coverage of retention problems across the United States and feedback surveys of reasons for Sailors leaving the Navy, there is sufficient information to point to reasons why people are leaving the Navy.

The next step in the strategic plan and information campaign is to set goals. These goals must be realistic, and measurable. And according to Mendelsohn (1973), they must be middle-range. Goals for this campaign should not be to increase retention figures across the board. If the new target audience for this information campaign is going to be Navy families, there should be a goal to include reaching certain numbers of them. Realistic middle-range goals could include:

1. To increase awareness to families about the benefits of staying in the Navy.



2. To provide information to families about the various programs that are unique and important to Navy members. This could include bonuses, but also special family support programs, education benefits, quality of life improvements, and more.
3. To reach a specific percentage (30%) of Navy families with the information campaign.

These goals are important steps in the process of changing retention patterns, and importantly, these are middle-range, reachable and measurable goals. Measuring the success of these goals may take new efforts – surveys of families through existing information paths (family service centers, Lifelines Web site, etc.), but the success of these can be measured.

Research is the next key element of the strategic plan for the information campaign. The planner and communicator need to know what the audience is thinking and how to reach them. A common first step in research is to use focus groups to help understand attitudes and behavior (Wimmer and Dominick, p. 97). A qualitative research method, focus groups can also get preliminary information and ideas for survey questions. These questions should not be leading and allow the focus group participants to exchange ideas and have an open discussion regarding the subject of retention.

Because the target audience for this campaign – families of service members – is a new audience for the Navy to reach regarding retention issues, some important groundwork must be done to find out about this audience. Unfortunately, not much specific information is available regarding Navy families. Some secondary information may be available through the Navywide Personnel Survey (service member responses about their families – size, location, etc.), but the Navy may need to energize certain





networks to provide more specific information that can be used in an information campaign. Some systems are available and already in place – Family Service Centers, Lifelines Web site, and spouse groups at specific commands and units. If these networks can be energized to start gathering information about families, some useful information could be provided to determine where the families get their information about Navy issues, what they value, and what role they see themselves playing in the retention decision of their Navy spouse.

In narrowing the audience, the next step in the strategic plan, the communicator must also consider segmentation. While an obvious and often targeted audience for the Navy is active duty service members, a new target audience that has not been used much in the past is families of Sailors and officers. The Navy does have several avenues for reaching the active duty Navy person and his or her family members, including Family Service Centers, Life Skills Education and Support, Personal Financial Management, Ombudsman and Key Volunteer Network Support, Spouse Employment Assistance Program, voting assistance programs, Relocation Assistance Program, New Parent Support, Distance Education, Volunteer/Retiree Coordination, the Lifelines Web site, and many more services. Based on studies referenced in the introduction, some researchers do believe that families play an important part in the retention decision for service members. Although the extent of that influence has not been determined, because so much of the information comes from anecdotal information, providing important retention information to families of service members is a worthy effort.

If the audience is service member families, the audience can be further segmented into opinion leaders, attentive publics, inattentive publics. Opinion leaders in this case





could be the spouses of the commanding officer and the senior enlisted members at units, spouse club officers, spouses of senior military leaders (Chief of Naval Operations, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, Fleet Command Master Chiefs, etc.), religious leaders at units (chaplains), and career counselors, to name a few. Attentive publics, or those who are at least mildly interested in the issue of retention, would likely include spouses of those who are up for reenlistment (enlisted) or who are at a pivotal career decision making point (officers). Inattentive publics, those who either oppose retention for their spouse or do not care about the issue, are a harder audience to reach and more difficult to convince. Therefore, targeting the inattentive audience is not necessarily a wise choice.

Developing a message depends on the research to this point about the audience's demographics and psychographics, the situation analysis, and the type of vehicle to be used to carry the message. Although this paper has presented a situation analysis, and demographics are available on service members (but it is harder to find detailed information and statistics on their families), no research has been done yet to determine more detailed psychographics and mass media use on families. Most of the information is anecdotal, which does not allow for as firm of a grounding for message development. Based on the middle-range goals -- increasing awareness about the benefits of staying in the Navy, providing information about the various programs that are unique and important to Navy members (monetary and quality of life), and reaching a specific number of Navy families -- some messages could include:

- Retention in the Navy impacts the family as well as the Sailor.



- The Navy is improving quality of life for your service member and your family. Visit [www.lifelines.com](http://www.lifelines.com) to see the latest initiatives to assist your decision regarding the Navy.

If the Navy can support focus groups with families of service members in various parts of the world, a better idea of messages that hit home can be better developed. The Bureau of Naval Personnel has one division that is focused on quality of life initiatives for service members and their families; a representative from that division should travel with the retention team and concentrate on providing the new initiatives and programs to service members and their families.

Information about the best media vehicles to carry the message to the audience of families is also determined on an anecdotal level, because there is no study or information that has identified where families of service members get the majority of their information about the Navy. There are a variety of internal and external vehicles currently used to distribute information to service members and their families, and these should continue to be used:

- The Navy Wire and News services, daily and weekly e-mail and message traffic that includes news stories about the Navy and personnel initiatives). Stories on retention should be included in base newspapers, provided to spouse support groups, placed in bulletins at Family Service Centers, included on the Lifelines Web site, and placed wherever family members could get the information.
- Navy/Marine Corps News, a weekly television program distributed via videotape to Navy and Marine commands worldwide that include a variety of educational and entertainment related stories geared toward active duty people. These could also be



viewed at Family Service Centers and other facilities where families would be as part of their daily life (medical clinics and hospitals, base exchanges, etc.).

- Lifelines, a new Web site that focuses on information for families, including moving to a new duty station, where to find needed facilities (exchanges, commissaries, hospitals, etc.), and other resources
- Other Web sites, including the Navy's home page and individual fleet and command home pages
- Mass media, including "Navy Times," a weekly independent newspaper headquartered in Springfield, Va., that covers Navy issues from hardware to personnel to families

After all of the above-mentioned steps are complete, the plan and campaign can finally be implemented. Evaluation should be done at every stage of the information campaign and strategic planning to correct any misdirection or problems that are being encountered along the way. The implementation stage includes keeping in mind the details of any event that has been planned and keeping the big picture of the campaign together; no items should be left out of this crucial area.

### Conclusion

This paper has examined the problem of retention facing the Navy today, looked at the use of communication as one method to help solve the problem, analyzed what the Navy has done so far in using communication to solve the retention problem, evaluated the Navy's communication efforts to date, and proposed a strategic communications plan for the Retention Team/Center to use (targeting families).





If one considers the Navy's effort to provide information to Sailors and their families an information campaign, it can be followed that communication plays a key role in the retention issue. The Navy must be able to successfully communicate its message of the benefits of retention to Sailors and their families in order to expect any type of behavior change. And the Navy has made many efforts to make this communication successful. Not all efforts have had consistent themes, nor have efforts been targeted to specific groups, but the theme of retention and certain benefits has been constant in the Navy's internal media coverage, as well as a big part of external media coverage of personnel issues.

Knowing that communication efforts do play a key role in information campaigns, the Navy may be able to make more of an impact on retention behavior by developing a specific campaign targeting a certain audience – Navy families. Studies have shown that families do play an important role in retention decisions, and by educating this audience on the benefits of retention, there could be progress made in the retention problem. The campaign would have to be researched thoroughly and new information obtained in demographics and psychographics of the family audience, but many avenues exist for obtaining that information.

While not a guarantee for fixing the end problem of retention that the Navy faces, by focusing education and information efforts on the family, the Navy can certainly include an often previously ignored audience in the decision process and arm this group with valuable information for making the right decision.

This area has many avenues for further research, in the modes of family psychographic research and even job satisfaction issues for the service members. Further



research might be directed at developing a survey or questionnaire to be used in determining job satisfaction in the military. The current surveys and questionnaires have been in existence for at least ten years and are not very widely used; they should be updated and offered more regularly.

Other possibilities for further research include comparing and contrasting different job specialties in the military (aviation, submarine, surface, medical corps, etc.) and examining their retention rates and job satisfaction levels. Each of these specialties, although they are all in the military framework, has their own unique approach to communication within the respective community, and some of those successful methods related toward high retention rates might translate well to other communities.

Each of the military services has their approach to the retention issue, and it could be useful to examine their tactics and what works for them. While each service has their own character and focus, some efforts might adapt well, with some translation, to the Navy's efforts.

Additionally, the development of the Navy's Retention Team and Center is noteworthy. The growth of the team is relatively new, and the Center has just been established. Examining their progress, goal development and success in the near future could provide some useful information. As part of this, the Navy is revamping its statistical method of tracking retention figures, to make the number more representative of the goal and the actual state of retention. Once that new system is in place, it could be useful to see how the retention issue is progressing.



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